

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 24, 2009

ALBANY BEACH FEASIBILITY STUDY

File No. 03-028-04
Project Manager: Tom Gandesbery

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$100,000 of Conservancy funds, derived from a Caltrans mitigation fund, to the East Bay Regional Park District to undertake a feasibility study of the restoration of sand dunes and other features located at Albany Beach, Alameda County.

LOCATION: East Shore State Park, City of Albany, Alameda County

PROGRAM CATEGORY: San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: [Project Location and Site Map](#)

Exhibit 2: [Project Area Map](#)

Exhibit 3: [Project Area Photo](#)

Exhibit 4: [Letter from BCDC](#)

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31111 and 31160-31165, of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of \$100,000 (one hundred thousand dollars) to East Bay Regional Park District (“District”) to complete a feasibility study for the restoration of sand dunes and related improvements located at Albany Beach, Alameda County, subject to the following condition:

Prior to disbursement of any funds under this authorization, the District shall submit the following for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

1. A detailed work plan for the project components, including a final budget and schedule.
 2. The names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained to carry out the project components.
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3. Evidence that all permits and approvals necessary to undertake the project have been obtained, if applicable.
4. Evidence that the Bay Conservation and Development Commission has found that the project qualifies for funding from the Cal-Trans mitigation fund held by the Conservancy.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated by the Conservancy on June 4, 2009.
2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Sections 31111 and 31160-31165 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the enhancement and restoration of wetlands and adjacent uplands in the San Francisco Bay Area.”

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The East Bay Regional Park District (District) proposes to undertake a feasibility study of the restoration of sand dunes and public access improvements located at Albany Beach, a part of the East Shore State Park (“Park”).

Staff recommends that the Conservancy fund this feasibility study to better inform the District and the public as to the feasibility of various improvements contemplated in the Eastshore State Park General Plan (“General Plan”). This study will evaluate the feasibility of replacing the weedy vegetation with native dune plants, some of which may include rare and endangered species. The study will examine various techniques that the District can employ to balance the protection of dune vegetation with the high volume public use that occurs at the Beach. The study, which is expected to take 18 months to complete, may also examine the removal of creosote pilings (which are toxic to aquatic life) and removal of other large debris present along this shoreline. The study would provide cost estimates for a range of potential improvements, and could also be used to identify potential alternatives for a future land use plan for this area. The District is well qualified to undertake this project as it has gained experience restoring a broad range of different habitat types within its extensive park system.

The General Plan identifies a number of habitat restoration and public access improvements for Albany Beach. Restoration of the beach would include enhancement of the existing beach and sand dunes. Debris would be removed from the beach and native dune vegetation would be planted to stabilize the upper beach and dunes. Public access to the beach and water would be provided by installation of new ADA compliant walkways and fencing that would provide access to the beach while minimizing impacts to the dunes. Interpretive exhibits, picnic facilities, restrooms and a staging area could also be provided.

The Albany Beach project could be implemented in phases as funds become available.

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Site Description: *The Albany Beach is a recently accreted sand beach approximately 580 feet in length and located immediately west of the Golden Gate Fields horse racing track and immediately south of the “Albany Bulb”, a former municipal landfill now open to the public as an open space park (Exhibits 2, 3). The beach is an artifact of man-made fill of the shoreline; however, the dunes located on the beach may be similar to dune systems that once were present along other parts of the San Francisco Bay shoreline. Recent work by scientists at other beach sites has brought to light the scarcity of this bay dune habitat and a recognition that the San Francisco Bay lost virtually all of its original dune habitat as a result of filling and wetland reclamation. These remnant, artifact or “pocket” beaches may have importance for native plants, some of which are rare and endangered, for example, sea blight (*Sueda californica*) as the District recently did at another location in Emeryville.*

Project History: The Albany Beach site is near the northern most extent of the East Shore State Park, a park for which the Conservancy funded the General Plan and related master planning activities in the early 1990s. The Conservancy also provided funds for the Berkeley Meadow Phase III restoration project which is currently in construction.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Grantee	<u>100,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$200,000

The Conservancy holds, in its Coastal Trust Fund mitigation funding that was set aside for the East Shore State Park and other east shore areas. The funding for this project is from a permit condition in approvals issued by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) for work undertaken by Caltrans on the nearby Interstate 80 Freeway. This project would likely utilize funds identified in BCDC permits for habitat restoration within the Park. These funds were deposited with the Conservancy pursuant to Interagency Agreement No. SFBC 05-14 with BCDC. BCDC staff has determined that this proposed project is consistent with the terms of the BCDC permit (Exhibit 4).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding resource enhancement in that the District will prepare a plan that examines the feasibility of protecting and restoring habitat at the subject site.

Under Section 31111, the Conservancy may fund feasibility studies by awarding grants to public agencies.

Under §31162(a), the Conservancy may award grants that will “improve public access to and around the bay, coast, ridge tops, and urban open spaces . . . through completion . . . of regional bay, coast, and ridge trail systems. . .”. The proposed project, as part of the Park, will enhance public access to and along San Francisco Bay. Under §31162(b), the Conservancy may act to “protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats and connecting corridors, watersheds, scenic areas and other open-space resources of regional importance.” The proposed planning will further

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develop the eight miles of shoreline within the Park for public access as well as habitat preservation. The Park serves residents of at least five cities as well as visitors to the region. Thus, this project will help protect and enhance the existing regionally significant open space that is within the Park. Furthermore, under §31162(d), the Conservancy may “promote, assist, and enhance projects that provide open space and natural areas that are accessible to urban populations for recreational and educational purposes.” Located in five highly urbanized cities and next to a major interstate freeway and the San Francisco Bay Trail, this Park is one of the most accessible urban state parks.

The proposed project also satisfies each of the five criteria for determining project priority under §31163(c) in the following respects: (1) the planning and restoration is consistent with the Eastshore State Park General Plan, East Bay Regional Park District’s 1997 Master Plan, the San Francisco Bay Plan, and the City of Albany’s land use plans; (2) the projects serves a regional need; (3) the projects will be implemented in a timely manner; (4) not restoring this property would result in the loss of a significant conservation and public recreational opportunity; and (5) matching funds from the grantee have been approved.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S 2007 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective 10B** of the Conservancy’s 2007 Strategic Plan, the proposed project will result in a plan that restores and enhances wetlands including tidal and sub-tidal habitats.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S CLIMATE-CHANGE CRITERIA

The proposed project will examine the feasibility of restoring the Albany Beach and will examine the potential reintroduction of native dune vegetation in light of climate change and rising sea level.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines, last updated on June 4, 2009 in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy’s statutory programs and purposes:** See the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Enabling Legislation” section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The creation and enhancement of the East Shore State Park had the support of many park planning participants as well as groups such as the Citizens for East Shore Parks (CESP). The District has worked closely with many citizens groups to implement habitat restoration at the Berkeley Meadow site. See “History” section above.

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4. **Location:** The project lies within the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay, Alameda County, and within the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program: Albany Beach, East Shore State Park, Alameda County
5. **Need:** The existing funding stream for many District lands (Measure CC) does not provide funds for Albany Beach. Measure WW, which was passed property owners residing within the District in 2008, does provides funds for acquisition and restoration projects but these funds are not available because they are based upon sale of future bonds sales. Some Measure WW funds may be available for construction in 2011 or 2012. The District is also seeking funding for this project through the Cosco-Busan Natural Resource Damage Assessment. However, these funds will not be available for at least one to two years. Completion of the study will make the project more competitive for Cosco-Busan funds and other funding sources.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** This planning and restoration effort will enhance a State Park that spans approximately eight miles of the San Francisco Bay shoreline and includes the cities of Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, Albany, and Richmond with an estimated combined population of well over 600,000. The project will enable this Park to better serve local residents as well as potential millions of visitors per year to the metropolitan Bay Area. Located near major freeways and other transportation routes, this park is one of the most accessible places in the Bay Area. In addition, the restoration techniques learned at this site could be used at other Bay beach sites.
7. **Sea Level Rise Vulnerability:** See “Consistency with Conservancy’s Climate Change Criteria” section above.

Additional Criteria

8. **Urgency:** Albany Beach is adjacent to the privately owned Albany Race Track. The owners of the Race Track, Magna Corporation, recently declared bankruptcy and the race track has been offered for sale. The District has been negotiating for some time to acquire a portion of the race track that would allow for expansion of Albany Beach and development of new public access facilities. However, should a private buyer acquire the race track, the District’s ability to develop a full restoration and public access project could be constrained.
9. **Resolution of more than one issue:** In this project, the District plans to explore the potential to restore sensitive dune habitat in a way that integrates high levels of public use of the beach.
10. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Innovation:** The study may result in recommendations for innovative ways to balance public use with protection of a rare habitat type, including an examination on the possible effects of climate change on such restoration efforts.
12. **Readiness:** The District has allocated matching funds and is ready to proceed.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals** “See “Project History” above.”
14. **Return to Conservancy:** See the “Project Financing” section above.

CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:

The proposed project is consistent with the policies contained in the San Francisco Bay Plan, adopted by BCDC in January 2006, and the policies of BCDC in that the study will examine the enhancement of intertidal and subtidal habitats (Fish, Other Aquatic Organisms and Wildlife Policy 1 and 2, Tidal Marshes and Tidal Flats Policy 4, Subtidal Areas Policy 3) and the improvement of public access and recreational opportunities while minimizing potential impacts on wildlife (Public Access Policies 2, 4, and 12).

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The planning and design work to be undertaken by the District is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262. The proposed authorization involves only planning for possible future actions not yet authorized or funded and the planning will include consideration of environmental factors. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon Conservancy approval of this project.